

# United States Patent [19]

Sanchez et al.

## [54] METHODS FOR HANDLING MASA

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[51] Int. Cl.<sup>6</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ A21C 9/00

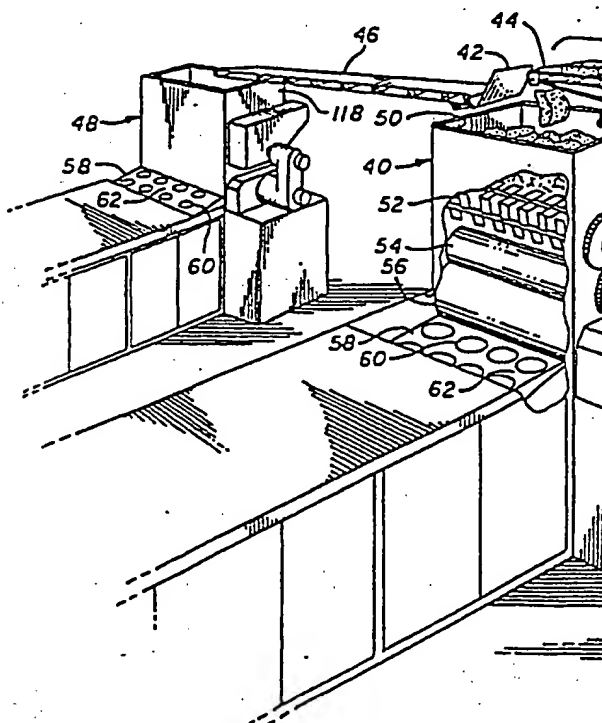
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[57] ABSTRACT

Masa handling methods for the continuous processing of masa type dough in conjunction with commonly available feed processing equipment, such as a masa extruder, an oven, or cooling apparatus. One masa handling method includes a masa separator having a pair of opposed, endless belt conveyors having facing surfaces spaced apart to receive a generally continuous masa stream output from a nozzle on the masa extruder. When the masa stream moves between the conveyors, it is gripped by their facing surfaces and moved away from the nozzle, causing the masa to be separated into individual pieces, or logs. The masa handling method can also include feeding the masa to masa hoppers fed by at least two endless belt conveyors arranged in upstream and downstream positions relative to each other. The masa is transported along the conveyors and is automatically diverted into one masa hopper by a diverter gate operated by a controller that receives a signal from a sensor sensing a masa level within an associated one of the hoppers. The hopper has one or more rotating shafts having projections to remove gas bubbles from the masa and force it toward the sheeter rollers. A pair of primary rollers with scrapers can be provided within the hopper to roll the masa to an intermediate thickness before it passes between the sheeter rollers.

20 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets

